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TITLE:      Research within Air Force Public Affairs:
            Perceptions, attitudes and use

AUTHOR:     Brian Kent Sattler, Capt., USAF, 1990,
            125 pages, Master of Arts (in Journalism),
            University of Texas.

ABSTRACT:

Thesis examined the function of research on external audiences
within U.S. Air Force base level public relations offices.  The
findings were examined to determine if education, experience
level and other factors affected the individual's propensity to
employ research on external publics.  Past study has concentrated
on the highest levels of command where little use of research was
found.  This remained consistent at the base level yet
respondents indicated that they engaged in much informal opinion
seeking and it was found that graduate level formal education
corresponded with conducting two-way symmetric and asymmetric
models of public relations (models of public relations where
research is most useful).  While conducting almost no formal
research on the opinions of publics, PAOs actively engaged in
informal means (primarily contacts with opinion leaders and, to a
lesser extent, contacts with the general public) to assess what
publics think and preferred a two-way method of public relations
as their primary goal for their public relations activities.
Formal methods of research remain problematic for the PAO; formal
bars, lengthy and demanding approval procedures and budgetary
constraints all impede the PAO's ability to conduct formal
research.

RESEARCH WITHIN AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND USE

APPROVED:

Supervisor: _Frank B. Kalupa_
Frank B. Kalupa

_Pamela Shoemaker_
Pamela Shoemaker

RESEARCH WITHIN AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES AND USE

by

BRIAN KENT SATTLER, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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May 1990

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# CHAPTER I

## PURPOSE

The basic truth is self-evident -- that
research and evaluation are essential in any
program of public relations that attempts at
sound public relations over a period of time.

- Edward L. Bernays (1986, p. 125)

So concluded one of public relation's leading

figures on the value of research in public relations.

Yet the value of research to public relations may not

be perceived as self-evident.  Public relations

practitioners remain divided on the subject; on the one

hand many practitioners support research as a

legitimate and necessary function used to supplement an

intuitive approach to public relations, and on the

other hand are practitioners who prefer only an

intuitive, "seat-of-the-pants" approach to public

relations (Dozier, 1984).  Yet beyond even this basic

matter of the perception of the value of research the

question remains problematic, for, even among its

supporters, research is a subject which often receives

more lip-service than employment.  Public relations

practitioners who support research seem to have a great

admiration for it as a powerful tool which, when

properly conducted, can be of critical importance in

1

skillfully working with the public, yet relatively few engage in it in a systematic or thorough fashion.

Past studies have shown that this failure to actively engage in research is a problem that similarly affects both civilian and governmental practitioners. While relatively few studies have concentrated on public relations as practiced within government, fewer still have examined the topic within military public affairs. These studies show that little research is conducted by military public relations people, yet these studies have dealt exclusively with how research is conducted at the highest levels of the organization leaving the question of research by practitioners at other levels untouched.

Within the Air Force, public affairs offices operating at installations around the country have great opportunity to contact publics directly and frequently. These offices, particularly those responsible for the public relations of the installation, have a unique opportunity and a charter to work with publics in ways untenable for public affairs in the Pentagon or elsewhere. This difference in operating environment and opportunity may impact the

way in which Public Affairs people at these installations practice public relations research.

## TOWARD PROACTIVITY

"Proactivity" is an expression which has seen increasing use among Air Force public affairs people in recent years, where it has been commonly defined as an orientation that promotes seeking information and planning appropriate activity rather than merely reacting to situations (Defend, 1988, p. 2). Expressed in that way, proactivity demands thorough and current knowledge of publics' opinions and attitudes toward issues. Thus research, whether formally or informally conducted, becomes an integral element in the effort to become increasingly proactive.

Yet for the Air Force public affairs officer (PAO) fulfilling this part of proactivity becomes problematic, for, unlike the civilian public relations practitioner, the PAO must operate within restrictions on the use of monies, mailing restrictions and specific survey approval procedures which limit the ability to directly assess publics' opinions, attitudes and concerns. Yet despite these barriers, there remain appropriate and viable ways to measure and evaluate the

opinions of publics. While research, either formally or informally, is seen by many as fundamental for consistently correct action (the kind of consistency needed to develop lasting positive relationships between bases and surrounding populations), its use may remain severely limited.

If the Air Force is to develop a more "proactive" approach to its public relations activities, then the perceptions and attitudes of its PAOs toward research become very important in that effort. It becomes important, therefore, to understand the factors which may bear on PAOs' attitudes, perceptions and use of research in their jobs. The next chapter will explore the issue of proactivity within Air Force public affairs, the research that has been done on the topic of public relations research in the civilian, governmental and military sectors, and some of the factors previously identified as affecting practitioner's attitudes and use of research in public relations.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature on the topic of public relations research, three primary areas deserve special attention. The first concerns the role of research in "proactivity" within Air Force public affairs. This review showed that an orientation toward research exists in the text of the regulation that governs the Air Force's public relations activities, but at the same time other statutes serve as unique barriers for the officer who wants to research publics; clearly a stage set for discord between desire or intent to conduct research and an active use of research. Secondly, a review of past literature reveals an apparent gap between practitioners' positive attitudes toward research and its use by practitioners within public relations as a whole, within governmental public relations, and more specifically, within public relations as practiced by the military services. The third of these areas concerns specific elements previously found to be factors in practitioners' attitudes toward and use of research in public relations; factors that may have similar affects on the attitudes of PAOs toward research.

# THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS MISSION

Public affairs, the Air Force term for public relations, exists to aid the Air Force in accomplishing its missions. In a statement of the doctrine of Air Force public affairs stipulated in Air Force Regulation 190-1 (1989, p. 16), fostering positive "public sentiment" is the goal:

> Public affairs is the primary means for supporting Air Force missions with the informed "public sentiment." Today, "public sentiment," or public support, is ultimately expressed through the public's willingness to provide the necessary resources for accomplishing Air Force missions.

As the regulation which governs Air Force public affairs activities, AFR 190-1 contains statements of doctrine which explain that it is the public affairs officer's duty to provide advice and counsel on public relations matters and that a "thorough knowledge of the command's missions and priorities, public attitudes toward Air Force issues, and the command's communications needs" are essential (p. 16). The regulation further states that it is the PAO who must bring to the decision-making process "judgment, representing the perspectives of both the Air Force and the public," and that this "counsel is most effective

when it is preventative" rather than remedial (p. 16).
The doctrine further states that:

> The Air Force vigorously discharges its
> legitimate public affairs responsibility to
> inform and educate the public on issues
> surrounding Air Force missions and
> requirements. This goes beyond responding to
> inquiries from the public and news media.
> The Air Force actively states its positions
> on Air Force and defense issues and engages
> in the public dialogue on those issues.
> (p. 18)

When taken together these statements clearly
establish persuasion or understanding as the goal.
These statements of doctrine reflect the growing
awareness of the need for an increasingly "proactive"
stance in Air Force public relations. Alan DeFend
(1988, p. 2), in a study of the need for and
entitlement to an increasingly "proactive" stance
within Air Force public affairs defines the term as "a
general forward-thinking and acting stance -- a
readiness and willingness for action -- an orientation
that seeks and plans activity and 'acts' rather than
'reacts' as its primary bearing."

DeFend states that while a change to proactivity
has been frequently emphasized in recent years, its
origins have often been reactions to negative
publicity. Much of this activity falls outside the

"'purest' definition of proactivity to the extent they are undertaken in response to negative communication stimulus" (p. 2). DeFend presents both public affair's philosophical imperatives and legal right to become an "advocate" rather than an "apologist" for the Air Force. In his study of proactivity he detailed what he termed three basic obstacles to public affairs excellence; formal bars to governmental (and, consequently, Air Force) communication, aspects of the military-media interface and criticism of the public affairs function. Additionally the problems all managers face, military and civilian alike, were found to affect proactivity; the universal problems of limited time, insufficient personnel, limited budgets and a tradition that runs counter to the desired action. The problem of formal bars to governmental communication combined with the criticism of the public affairs function makes Air Force public affairs, and its problem of proactivity, different from the world of corporate public relations.

# RESEARCH AND PROACTIVITY

Research is fundamental to this kind of proactivity. Doctrine that emphasizes thorough knowledge of public attitudes and judgment representing the public presupposes research, either formally or informally, of the external audience. Indeed the public affairs community relations program is chartered with study and analysis of "public and organizational attitudes," and emphasizes that "an understanding of the public mood" is a key element in the program (AFR 190-1, 1989, p. 98). Lieutenant Colonel Carl Foster (1985, p. 38) stressed the need for a "central office for research and coordination" to "direct surveys, research, analysis of effort, and report findings and trends to public officials." Foster envisioned such an office at the Secretary of the Air Force/Public Affairs (SAF/PA) level providing information for use at the local level. SAF/PA has recently added such an office, the Special Assistant for Analysis, that has many of these duties.

Yet, how do Air Force PAOs at Air Force bases throughout the United States fulfill the research requirement implied by public affairs doctrine?

Several bars to governmental communications impact the
methods these PAOs may use in gathering information on
public attitudes and perceptions about Air Force
activities.  Air Force Regulation 190-1 (1989, p. 18)
states that while "congressionally-imposed restrictions
on governmental public affairs activities have been
variously interpreted and compliance throughout
government has been inconsistent, Air Force public
affairs programs must conform to both their letter and
their spirit."

In a brief summary, the regulation explains that
early restrictions on government public affairs
appeared in the Gillette amendment to the Deficiency
Appropriation Act of 1913 (Congressional Record, 1913,
pp. 4409-11) which forbid the use of appropriated funds
to hire "publicity experts" without the expressed
approval of Congress.  Later legislation, such as the
so-called "gag law" of 1919 (see U.S.C.A., Title 18,
1913), forbid use of appropriated funds for "publicity
or propaganda purposes" to influence legislation
pending before Congress.  In the early 1970s two

additional laws impacted on public affairs.  In the

first:

> No part of any appropriation contained in
> this or any other Act, or of the funds
> available for expenditure by a corporation or
> agency, shall be used for publicity or
> propaganda purposes designed to support or
> defeat legislation pending before the
> Congress. (Pub. Law 92-351, Sec 608 [a], July
> 13, 1972)

The second public law, enacted less than a year

later, further defined the limits of expenditures

toward influencing Congress or legislation:

> No part of any appropriation contained in
> this or any other Act, or of the funds
> available for expenditure by any corporation
> or agency shall be used, other than for
> normal and recognized executive-legislative
> relationships, for publicity or propaganda
> purposes, for the preparation, distribution
> or use of any kit, pamphlet, booklet,
> publication, radio, television, or film,
> presentation designed to support or defeat
> legislation pending before the Congress,
> except for the presentation to Congress
> itself.  (Pub. Law 93-50, Sec. 305, July 1,
> 1973)

Still other legislation forbid the use of the free

mail frank for mailing material without a request, a

law which has a particularly chilling affect on public

opinion surveying:

> Except as otherwise provided in this section,
> an officer, executive or independent
> establishment of the Government of the United
> States may not mail, as penalty mail, any
> article or document unless -- (1) a request
> therefor has been received by the department
> or establishment;" (see U.S.C.A., Title 39,
> Sec. 3204)

Additionally, all requests to gather information

from the public must be cleared through the Office of

Management and Budget (OMB). Elaborate procedures

exist for clearance and approval of instruments for

obtaining factual information or opinions from the

public. Applicable for any solicitation of facts or

opinions from 10 or more individuals, the OMB clearance

exists to ensure that such information is obtained with

minimum burden to the public and minimum cost to the

government and that duplication of effort within the

federal government is eliminated.

Each of these factors have an affect on the Air

Force's use of research in its external programs and

especially in regard to its use of research on public

opinion. In a report on Air Force public affairs

Colonel Marvin Harris (1987) discussed the

implementation of public relations theory. Harris

found that public affairs did little to follow the four basic steps of public relations theory in day-to-day operations:  defining the problem (research), planning and programming, taking action and communicating, and evaluating the program.  "With as many technically educated people as there are in Air Force public affairs," he explains, "one would assume that the four-step method is used to some degree.  However there is room for improvement....It is difficult to have a good, effective public affairs program if the first and last steps are not done -- a problem that the Air Force has with many of its programs" (p. 42).

## THE RESEARCH GAP

A great deal has been written about the benefits of an active program of research for a public relations effort.  Paul Alvarez (1983, p. 27) hailed accountability that research provides as "the key to a new era for public relations," and Ray Chapman (1982, p. 28) explained that the "old argument that the practice of public relations is abstract and therefore cannot be measured is no longer acceptable."  James Strenski (1981, p. 16) writes that a "measurable return

on communications investment is the hue and cry from the board room." Broom and Dozier (1983, p. 5) add that "if public relations is to contribute fully to the survival and growth of organizations in the decades ahead ... executives and practitioners must build scientific research and evaluation into the process."

In 1977 when Allen Center "canvassed the calling," 73% of the respondents rated opinion research as very important. Yet Peter Finn (1982) found that 52% of senior communications executives at Fortune 1,000 companies did not use research in their programs and that these respondents were more likely to rate their management's perception of the public relations function lower and to report management as more skeptical of budget requests. Despite all the talk about it, the volume and quality of research and evaluation in the field has lead James Grunig (1983, p. 28) to lament:

> Lately, I have begun to feel more and more like a fundamentalist minister railing against sin; the difference being that I have railed for evaluation. Just as everyone is against sin, so most public relations people I talk to are for evaluation. People keep on sinning, however, and PR people continue not to do evaluation research.

And too, the quality of the research being conducted may be lacking. Dozier (1985), in a review of the practice of planning and evaluation in public relations, points out that what he calls pseudo-planning and pseudo-evaluation account for most of the current, limited research effort. Dozier describes these pseudo events as having the process of communication, rather than its effects, as the goal. He explains that "communication is not the outcome, the measurable impact, of a successful public relations program. Communication is important only in the effects it achieves among publics" (p. 19). Dozier notes that the "current practices are deeply rooted in the educational and professional experiences of practitioners" (p. 24) and that change will be slow.

Lloyd Kirban (1983, p. 22) wrote of the continuing confusion between measuring activities and effects; a confusion between "output measurements versus impact measurement." Broom and Dozier (1983, p. 6) also examined the fallacy of measuring the communication process rather than effects; "if public relations programs are designed to accomplish specific objectives related to changes in knowledge levels, opinions, attitudes and behaviors, then measures of those changes

are the only appropriate indicators of success or failure."

Even for those who have adopted a scientific style of management involving research the transition has not been total. Dozier (1984) examined the extent to which practitioners used "seat-of-the-pants" technique or depended on increasingly scientific technique in their practice. He identified three emerging styles of practice, one "scientific" and one "seat-of-the-pants" employed by manager oriented practitioners. He also found that technician oriented practitioners adopted no particular style at all. Dozier points out that a wholesale abandonment of the intuitive techniques employed by the "seat-of-the-pants" manager in preference for the emerging reliance on scientific techniques was unsubstantiated. He saw instead a propensity to use "scientific impact evaluation to supplement rather than replace 'seat-of-the-pants' approaches to problem solving and evaluation" (p. 19).

## GOVERNMENT'S RESEARCH GAP

Grunig and Hunt estimated in 1984 that nearly 50% of all public relations practitioners work within the

public information model (where the dissemination of information is the primary goal), a model unlikely to conduct public opinion research, and that nearly always this model is used by government agencies. Pollack (1984) found that fully 70% of government practitioners had little or no formal training in public relations. In examining the use of research and evaluation in governmental public relations, Hiebert and Devine (1985) found a significant gap between public information officer's attitudes toward research and their employment of research and evaluation in their work. They found that "public information officers in the federal government conduct almost no research and evaluation of their public information activities," and that "what little is done is conducted informally and almost haphazardly, despite a widely-held view among public information officers that research and evaluation are very important to the successful execution of public information programs" (p. 47).

Hiebert and Devine found that around 80% of their survey respondents never or rarely conducted public opinion surveys. They found that informal research techniques were far more popular with government practitioners than were formal research techniques.

More significant was the authors' finding on attitudes toward research and evaluation. Survey respondents registered great enthusiasm for research and evaluation; 85% thought evaluations of the public information function was either an important or very important function. "There is little question about the PIO's positive attitudes toward research and evaluation," the authors write, "The problems lie with their reluctance to involve themselves in these kinds of activities" (p. 54).

Much of this reluctance may stem from what Hiebert and Devine termed "barriers to research." In examining these barriers they sought information on how the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Congress, individual agency leadership, budgets, staff qualifications, and the availability of staff time each were perceived as barriers to the use of research and evaluation in public information programs. In the study 66% of the respondents saw their budget as important or very important as a barrier to research and evaluation; 54% considered the OMB to be an important or very important barrier; 52% counted the availability of staff time as an equally significant barrier; 31% leadership; 28% staff qualifications; 24%

saw the Congress as a barrier to research and evaluation.

Hiebert and Devine (1985, p. 54) conceded that the question of budget as a barrier "invariably generated a bit of laughter" but noted that OMB restrictions were a concern less familiar to the non-governmental practitioner. As Fetig and Rixon (1987) point out, the laws and restrictions impacting research and evaluation in military public affairs is one of the key differences between the way public relations is practiced in the military and the private sector.

Hiebert and Devine explain that "Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines currently require agencies to file a request with OMB to survey members of the public. Elaborate clearance procedures for public surveys have restrained many agencies from pursuing this activity on their own" (p. 49). These OMB guidelines apply to the Air Force as well. Air Force Regulation 700-11, Management and control of information reports requirements, outlines Air Force policy in compliance with these OMB directives and is applicable to surveys of 10 or more individuals (AFR 700-11, 1986, Chapter 4).

Yet in conclusion, Heibert and Devine conjectured that "a lack of understanding or a lack of training in research and evaluation seems to be an important factor" (p. 55) for the public information officer's failure to conduct more research and evaluation. They concluded that "it remains to be determined if a lack of training in research and evaluation of public information activities is indeed the missing link which prevents the respondents from engaging in these kinds of activities" (p. 56).

Is training the missing link that prevents Air Force public affairs people from conducting more research? For the Air Force PAO education is a continual process. Many come to the Air Force with educational backgrounds directly related to communications, public relations or the social sciences. While during initial training at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) officers receive only a brief introduction to research and evaluation procedures, continuing education is considered an integral element of career development. Many PAOs participate in the Air Force Short Course in Communication, an eight-week graduate-level course with a research emphasis located at the University of

Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. Officer's pursue

advanced degrees either on their off-duty time, or for

some, as part of the Air Force Institute of Technology

(AFIT) program.

The literature suggests the following hypotheses:

> $H_1$  The more important a PAO thinks
> knowing public opinion is, the more
> public opinion research he/she will
> conduct.
>
> $H_2$  The higher the PAO's level of
> formal education, the more
> important he/she will think it is
> to know public opinion.
>
> $H_3$  The higher the PAO's level of
> formal education, the more public
> opinion research he/she will
> conduct.
>
> $H_4$  The higher the PAO's level of
> formal education, the less
> confident he/she will be in their
> current knowledge of public
> opinion.

### STATUS OF MILITARY PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The gap between positive attitudes toward research

and its actual use is a problem that pervades civilian

and military public relations alike. Stephens (1978)

found military public relations departments likely to

delegate the information seeking tasks to outside

consulting firms. Stephens also looked at the emphasis

on research and evaluation within military public

affairs and called for "much more monitoring" (p. 22) as well as various research and analysis techniques to help military public affairs meet is multi-faceted challenges of accountability. In a later examination of Army public relations, Stephens (1981) found a gap between attitudes toward research and its actual use on the job. While he found Army PAOs to be far more likely to be "synchronic," that is, to give information before seeking from the public, he also found that the respondents would like to spend far more time conducting formal surveys before a project.

While military public affairs is more similar than dissimilar to civilian public relations there remain important differences that affect research. DeFend (1988, p. 12) points out that "regulatory and legal guidelines on surveys, mailing privileges, stated objectives and (the) use of monies" are some key differences in research between military public affairs and public relations. DeFend notes that the Air Force makes good use of opinion research in its internal information programs but that while this same type of polling would be of great benefit in its public information, media relations and community relations

programs, restrictions make the traditional approaches

enjoyed by corporate public relations untenable.

Is Air Force Public Affairs experiencing the same

research and evaluation gap as governmental information

as a whole?  Most probably, yes, given the fact that

PAOs operate under many of the same constraints as

government information officers.  Yet, as DeFend

writes, "much as new sommeliers are given the keys to

the cellar in the course of their training, new public

affairs people learn they are to avoid getting too

close to anything resembling 'public relations' because

there are laws against it" (p. 22).  Could this

generate an unnecessary timidness and a hesitancy to

conduct research on the attitudes and beliefs of

publics?

The literature suggests the following hypothesis:

> $H_5$  The less experience a PAO has
> in public affairs, the less he/she
> will support public opinion
> research as a legitimate function
> of public affairs.

Additionally I would ask the following research question:

> $Q_1$ Do PAOs perceive a tendency among their peers to overcompensate for restrictions on public affairs activities by avoiding practices that seem too much like "public relations?"

## MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The perceived value of research, and its implementation, may be related in part to the nature of the organization in which practitioners work. Grunig and Hunt (1984, pp. 21-27) found that the way practitioners employ research was a good predictor of the model of public relations they are engaged in. Grunig and Hunt developed four models of public relations practice: Press agentry/publicity, Public information, Two-way asymmetric, and Two-way symmetric. In turn, the basic purpose of each model is: propaganda, dissemination of information, scientific persuasion, and mutual understanding.

The Press agentry/publicity model involves no research or evaluation beyond "counting the house" to determine success. Practitioners working within the Public information model seldom go beyond the occasional readership or readability survey. Only in

the two-way models of public relations does research
become significant. Yet Grunig and Hunt recognize a
distinct difference between research and evaluation
conducted for asymmetric public relations and that
conducted for a symmetric public relations program.
They note that research conducted within the model of
asymmetric public relations is generally a scientific
measurement of public attitudes before and after a
campaign to determine the effectiveness of the effort.
Research and evaluation for symmetric public relations,
however, goes beyond this "to learn how the public
perceives the organization and to determine what
consequences the organization has for the public"
(p. 25).

In a study of public relations research, Larry
Judd (1987) found that practitioners who perceived
their organizational environment to function in a two-
way environment (using Grunig's models of public
relations practice) were significantly more likely to
engage in research and evaluation.

Ellyn Pollack (1984), in her thesis work under the
direction of James Grunig, applied Grunig's models to
the area of public information in the federal
government. While Pollack found that most government

agencies were not practicing the most effective model
of public relations for their circumstances, she also
found a positive relationship between advanced eduction
in public relations and a propensity to employ the two-
way models of public relations.

In correlating the models of public relations with
public relations activities Pollack found that the two-
way symmetric practitioner made informal contact with
the public and "thought leaders," the two-way
asymmetric practitioner only sought contact with
"thought leaders," and the press agentry and public
information practitioners made no effort toward
informal contact.

The literature suggests the following hypotheses:

$H_6$  The higher the PAO's level of
formal education, the more he/she
will conduct public relations in a
two-way manner.

$H_7$  PAOs who conduct public
relations in a two-way manner will
conduct more public opinion
research than PAOs who conduct
public relations in a one-way
manner.

$H_8$  PAOs who conduct public
relations in a two-way manner will
seek more informal contacts with
the public than PAOs who conduct
public relations in a one-way
manner.

GOAL CONGRUENCY AND JOB SATISFACTION

Bissland and Rentner (1989) found in a survey of civilian practitioners that 56% believed that the overall role they desired for their organization's public relations differed from that preferred by their management. Additionally they found that those whose view of the role of public relations was not aligned with their perception of their management's view indicated significantly less job satisfaction. As one of the primary goals of the public affairs officer of a unit having host base public affairs responsibility is to support the commander's policies and programs as effectively as possible, a close working relationship with the commander and knowing intimately his or her wishes and desires concerning the employment of public affairs activities is essential. Knowing the commander's view of the overall purpose for public relations is imperative.

In evaluating the difference between a PAO's view of the ideal role of public relations and his/her understanding of their commander's view of the ideal role for public relations one must understand the concept of congruency. McLeod and Chaffee (1973) developed a model of coorientation, of which congruency

was one element, by drawing heavily upon the conceptual paradigm of the Newcomb (1953) coorientation model. Newcomb's model assumed that two persons, A and B, who are attracted to each other, are simultaneously cooriented to an object of communication, X. Congruency, therefore, is the similarity between the perception of the other person's feeling and the person's own feelings (accuracy, on the other hand, would be tested by measuring the other person's actual feelings toward X).

Thus the variables used in the analysis of congruency are not the concepts held by either party but the understandings of those concepts. The variables are the relationships between the orientational measures, not the measures themselves. While congruency is not a true interpersonal variable (since it is indexed by the degree of similarity between the person's own cognitions and his perception of another person's cognitions) it remains an important element in understanding an individual's attitude toward an object, in this case the appropriate way to conduct public relations activities.

A review of the literature leads me to state the following hypothesis:

> $H_9$ PAO s whose preferred overall role for public affairs is congruent with their perception of their commander's preferred overall role will express more job satisfaction than PAO s whose preferred overall role is not congruent.

## WORK ROLE AND RESEARCH

In another study of the factors affecting public relations research, Larry Judd (1987) examined the relationship between a practitioner's perceived work role and a propensity for research and evaluation. He found that practitioners who perceived themselves as managers were far more likely to engage in research and evaluation projects than were practitioners who identified themselves as technicians.

The literature suggests the following hypothesis:

> $H_{10}$ The more a PAO perceives himself/herself to be in a manager-practitioner role, the more public opinion research he/she will conduct.

## THE DEFINITION OF PUBLICS

While measuring public opinion may be a different proposition for public affairs officers than for public

relations practitioners in the corporate world, many similarities remain. One common thread is the distinction that is made in public relations between seeking "mass opinion" and seeking the opinion of specific publics.

For public relations practitioners, measuring opinion isn't as simple as one may think. A review of the major basic texts for public relations education [Aronoff and Baskin (1983); Center and Walsh (1985); Cutlip and Center (1985); Grunig and Hunt (1984); Moore and Kalupa (1985); Nager and Allen, (1984); Newsom and Scott (1985); Simon (1984); Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1986)] reveals a significant distinction between measuring mass opinion and seeking the opinions of specific publics.

This distinction between the opinions of specific publics and the opinion of the mass, or general public, is not new. Simon (1976, p. 124) determined that "issues create their own publics," and Blumer (1946, p. 47) stated that a public's "existence centers on the presence of an issue. As issues vary, so do the corresponding publics." Blumer went on to define publics as a group of people who are (1) confronted by an issue, (2) are divided on their ideas on how to

handle that issue and (3) engage in discussion on that issue. Little has changed between Blumer's position and the contemporary view stated by Hennessy (1985, p. 144): "If one accepts our working definition of public opinion as necessitating (a) an issue, (b) publics affected by that issue, and (c) an expression of views, then an opinion may be usefully thought of as a sharpened object-specific attitude."

James Grunig is one contemporary researcher to apply this concept of issue specific publics to opinion research. Grunig (1978) recognized that the classification of publics based on demographic categories or as groups in conflict with the organization was often less appropriate to the public relations task than recognition of publics based on categories of behavior. Based on Dewey's (1927) definition of a public, which Grunig (1978, p. 109) rephrases as "a group of individuals who (1) face a similar indeterminate situation (2) recognize what is indeterminate in that situation, and (3) organize to do something about that situation," Grunig developed a three tiered model of publics. Grunig conceptualized the three conditions of a public presented by Dewey as three stages of evaluation beginning with a latent

public as a public faced with an indeterminate
situation but unaware that it is a problem.  Then,
according to Grunig, if the group recognizes the
situation as problematic they become an aware public
and when the group organizes to discuss or take action
on the problem they become an active public.

Grunig found that publics could be categorized on
the basis of similar behaviors and that those publics
most likely to communicate with an organization could
be isolated.  Additionally, he found that the most
active publics were not necessarily the ones common
sense would predict.  Grunig's study demonstrated that
one could use definitions of publics based on behavior
as an effective means of evaluating and planning public
relations activities.

Grunig (1979) included in a study of corporate
social responsibility the use of specific publics
involved in the issue, again recognizing three specific
publics with opinions unique to their group.  By
borrowing from Grunig's models of public relations
activity and his three tiered model of publics one can
conceive that effective two-way communications would
require either (1) for a two-way asymmetric approach,
knowing what the publics are and where they are in

their evolution as a public in order to know how best
to persuade them, or (2) for a two-way symmetric
approach, recognize the different publics on an issue
and work with tailored programs to meet both the
organization's and each public's specific needs.  In
either case, operating in a two-way environment would
presuppose knowledge of the specific nature of publics
and public opinion.

A review of the literature suggests the following
hypotheses:

$H_{11}$  The higher the PAO's level of
formal education, the more he/she
will define publics based on their
relationship to an issue.

$H_{12}$  The higher the PAO's level of
formal education, the more he/she
will define publics as groups of
people in conflict, competition or
interaction with the organization.

$H_{13}$  The higher the PAO's level of
formal education, the less he/she
will define publics on the basis of
demographic categories.

$H_{14}$  The higher the PAO's level of
formal education, the more he/she
will research specific publics
rather than the general public.

Additionally I would ask the following research questions:

> $Q_2$  How do PAOs view the current emphasis within the public affairs career field on knowing the opinions of publics on the issues that affect the Air Force?

> $Q_3$  Do PAOs foresee any change in the importance of knowing public opinion for the success of the public affairs mission in the coming decade?

# HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

HYPOTHESES:

$H_1$ The more important a PAO thinks knowing public opinion is, the more public opinion research he/she will conduct.

$H_2$ The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more important he/she will think it is to know public opinion.

$H_3$ The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more public opinion research he/she will conduct.

$H_4$ The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the less confident he/she will be in their current knowledge of public opinion.

$H_5$ The less experience a PAO has in public affairs, the less he/she will support public opinion research as a legitimate function of public affairs.

$H_6$ The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more he/she will conduct public relations in a two-way manner.

$H_7$ PAOs who conduct public relations in a two-way manner will conduct more public opinion research than PAOs who conduct public relations in a one-way manner.

$H_8$ PAOs who conduct public relations in a two-way manner will seek more informal contacts with the public than PAOs who conduct public relations in a one-way manner.

$H_9$ PAO s whose preferred overall role for public affairs is congruent with their perception of their commander's preferred overall role will express more job satisfaction than PAO s whose preferred overall role is not congruent.

$H_{10}$ The more a PAO perceives himself/herself to be in a manager-practitioner role, the more public opinion research he/she will conduct.

$H_{11}$  The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more he/she will define publics based on their relationship to an issue.

$H_{12}$  The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more he/she will define publics as groups of people in conflict, competition or interaction with the organization.

$H_{13}$  The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the less he/she will define publics on the basis of demographic categories.

$H_{14}$  The higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more he/she will research specific publics rather than the general public.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

$Q_1$  Do PAOs perceive a tendency among their peers to overcompensate for restrictions on public affairs activities by avoiding practices that seem too much like "public relations?"

$Q_2$  How do PAOs view the current emphasis within the public affairs career field on knowing the opinions of publics on the issues that affect the Air Force?

$Q_3$  Do PAOs foresee any change in the importance of knowing public opinion for the success of the public affairs mission in the coming decade?

# CHAPTER III

## METHOD

Subjects for this study were all Air Force public affairs officers, active duty military and civilian, holding positions as chief or director of public affairs offices having host base responsibility at Air Force and Air Force Reserve installations within the continental United States.

Individuals were selected from the U.S. Air Force Public Affairs Staff Directory (dated January 1989). To ensure that the most current information available was used I contacted the office responsible for the directory, the Policy and Program Development Division of the Air Force Service Information and News Center (AFSINC), Kelly AFB, Texas, for any additional changes since publication.

Eighty-four surveys were completed out of the population of 97 public affairs officers within the group yielding a response rate of 87%. One survey was refused (refusal rate of 1%), nine individuals were unavailable during the duration of the study (9%) and three were unreached because of none working numbers (3%).

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## APPARATUS

Research questions and hypotheses were tested using a telephone survey. The questionnaire contained 23 items and required an average of eight minutes to complete. The survey (see Appendix A) contained items to measure the respondent's formal education level, years of experience in public affairs, gender, and employment status (whether active duty military or civilian).

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate themselves in their current role on an interval scale from one to ten, with one being concerned solely with the technical aspects of public relations activities (i.e., hands on) and ten being solely in a managerial role of planning, policy and problem solving.

PAOs' attitudes towards the importance of knowing the opinions of publics was measured on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from very important to never important. The respondent's confidence in his or her knowledge of the opinions of publics was also measured on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from very confident to never confident.

Each respondent was asked how often he or she conducted formal research (clarified as a scientific measure) or informal research (a nonscientific measure) on the opinions of publics about issues that concerned his or her installation. Responses were recorded using a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from very often to never.

Respondents' perceptions of their commander's choice of the purpose of public affairs within their organization, their own views of which role public affairs should have in their organization (i.e., their goals) and thirdly, what role public affairs actually fulfills in their organizations (how well they are meeting their goal) were determined in a series of three questions. In each question the respondent was asked to choose which of four models of public relations best described the overall role in each instance. The four available statements were based on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations and were previously used by Judd (1987) in determining whether respondents engaged in one-way or two-way methods of public relations. Each response option was modified slightly to make it Air Force specific.

Each respondent's propensity to seek informal contact with opinion leaders and the general public was measured on a 5-point ordinal scale with choices varying from very often to never.

Each respondent's perception of the current emphasis within Air Force public affairs (that is, within their sphere of contact) on research was measured on a 5-point ordinal scale using statements indicating that it needs much greater emphasis to needing much less emphasis. Additionally, each respondent's view of the future importance of the knowledge of public opinion for the success of Air Force public affairs was measured on a 5-point ordinal scale using statements ranging from a great increase in importance to a great decrease in importance.

Each respondent's level of job satisfaction was rated on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied.

Perceptions of the Air Force's right to seek information about the opinions of publics was measured using a statement about having a right to measure the opinions of publics with the individual's response measured on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement. Also, each

respondent's attitude toward a perceived tendency of public affairs people to "shy away from" public relations activities was measured by a statement and the identical scale.

Each respondent's level of sophistication in defining publics was based on their agreement or disagreement with three statements concerning ways of defining publics, ranging from least sophisticated (using demographics) to most sophisticated (based on issue awareness and attitudes). Again, their responses were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale. In the final question, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a statement about researching specific groups rather than the general public to measure their disposition to focus their research (either formal or informal research). Gender of the respondent was completed by the surveyer and military or civilian status was determined from the PAO staff directory.

## PROCEDURE

Prior to conducting the survey, each respondent was sent a brief letter (see Appendix B) introducing the study. All telephone calls were made during a two-week period to the primary numbers listed for each

potential respondent. Calls not placed at a convenient time for the respondent were rescheduled and completed at a later time. Corrections to nonworking numbers or changed numbers were pursued through available means (e.g. directory assistance), although not all efforts were successful.

All surveys were completed using neutral response techinque and standardized clarification when necessary and were conducted by the same individual. For the first two days, calls were restricted geographically (so the call would not preceed the arrival of the introductory letter), but by the third day all cases were eligible for completion.

## STATISTICS

Data from the completion of the 84 cases was entered into a data file for statistical analysis using the SPSS-x statistical package. Frequencies were run on all variables. Because of the nature of the data chi-square analysis was used to test hypotheses about relationships between the variables.

# CHAPTER IV

## SURVEY RESULTS

An examination of the data from the survey shows
that Public Affairs Officers in the leadership
positions at public affairs offices with host base
responsibility within the continental United States are
an experienced group with a mean experience level of
10.6 years in the public affairs career field (see
Table 1). Experience levels for the group varied
greatly, however, ranging from one to 27 years. They
are also a highly educated group (see Table 2). While
18% have some college or a bachelor's degree, fully 24%
of the group have credit hours towards a master's
degree and 53% hold master's degrees. Only 5%,
however, have sought formal education beyond the
master's level.

Within the group there was a fairly even ratio of
men and women (see Table 3) as women made up close to
40% of the sample. The ratio of active duty military
officers to civilian personnel in the group was quite
different as only 14% of the total were civilian
personnel (Table 4).

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Table 1.
Experience level of respondents.
N = 84

| Years of Experience | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| One to five years | 21.4% |
| Six to 10 years | 32.3% |
| 11 to 15 years | 29.8% |
| 16 to 21 years | 10.8% |
| 22 to 27 years | 6.0% |
| | 100.0% |

Mean = 10.6 years    Median = 10 years

Standard Deviation = 1.124

Table 2.
Respondents' level of formal education.
N = 84

What is your highest level of Education?

| Level of education | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Some college | 2.4% |
| Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent) | 15.5% |
| Work completed toward Master's degree | 23.8% |
| Master's degree (M.A., M.S.) | 53.6% |
| Work completed toward Doctorate degree | 4.8% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 3.
Gender of respondents.
N = 84

| Sex | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Male | 63.1% |
| Female | 36.9% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 4.
Respondents' employment status.
N = 84

| Status | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Military officer | 85.7% |
| Civilian | 14.3% |
| | 100.0% |

Most PAOs rated themselves more as managers than
as technicians on a scale of technical versus
managerial roles. With a median rating of seven on the
scale of one to 10 it was evident that most PAOs in the
position of chief or director of public affairs offices
saw managing and its related duties as their primary
function in their current role (see Table 5). Although
not quantified for this study, many PAOs who rated
themselves toward the technical side of the scale
referenced shortages in staff or a staff deficiency in
a particular skill (which they possessed) as the reason
for taking on a greater technical role.


PUBLIC OPINION


When asked to rate the importance of knowing the
opinions of publics to their job, 87% of the
respondents said that it was very important (see Table
6). Only 13% said that it was important or sometimes
important. These results are in no way surprising
(although the measure could have benefitted from
greater variability). Following each respondent's
rating of the importance of knowing public opinion,
each was asked to rate their confidence in their

knowledge of the opinions of publics about issues of
concern to their installation (see Table 7). Here,
greater variability in the responses was evident.
While nearly 30% stated that they were very confident
in their knowledge of the opinions of publics, the
majority, 54%, said they were confident in their
knowledge. Fourteen percent of the respondents were
only sometimes confident and 2% indicated that they
were rarely confident.

## RESEARCH

Response on the question of the use of formal
research for assessing public opinion was in keeping
with expectations, i.e., almost none is done (see Table
8 below). Thirty-two percent indicated that they never
conduct formal research, 44% rarely conduct formal
research while 24% indicated that they sometimes or
often conduct formal research on public opinion. It is
possible that these answers may have been inflated by
some respondents due to confusion between opinion
research on the internal and external audience (PAOs
periodically conduct a newspaper readership survey, a
survey of the internal audience, and this may have been

Table 5.
Percentage of respondents by ratio of technical and
managerial duties in their current role.
N = 84.

Considering your role in your current position, where
would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1
being a professional who handles the technical
production of messages and public relations activities
and 10 being a professional and manager who facilitates
communication and is involved in planning, policy and
problem solving?

| Current Role | Scale | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Solely Technical | 1-2 | 0.0% |
| | 3 | 2.4% |
| | 4 | 2.4% |
| | 5 | 17.9% |
| | 6 | 8.3% |
| | 7 | 20.2% |
| | 8 | 20.2% |
| | 9 | 20.2% |
| Solely Managerial | 10 | 8.3% |
| | | 100.0% |

Mean = 7.25     Median = 7     Std Deviation = 1.76

included in some responses).

Conversely, PAOs who find themselves unable to conduct formal research to assess public opinion report conducting a great amount of informal public opinion research (see Table 9). Forty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they conducted informal research on the opinions of publics very often, while 35% said they often conducted informal research.

## ROLE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PAOs perceive their bosses to be a very savvy group when it comes to public relations, with 54% of the respondents indicating that their commanders would say that the two-way symmetric model of public relations is the preferred overall role for public affairs within their organization (see Table 10). The information dissemination model was the second most popular model with commanders according to the PAOs; 35% of respondents indicated this model was preferred by their commanders. Press agentry and the two-way asymmetric models of public relations tied in popularity with 6% each.

Table 6.
Attitudes of respondents toward the importance of
knowing the opinions of publics on issues of concern to
their installation.
N = 84

How important would you say it is that, as the public
affairs officer, you know the opinions of publics
affected by issues of concern to your installation?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Never important | 0% |
| Rarely important | 0% |
| Sometimes important | 3.6% |
| Important | 9.5% |
| Very important | 86.9% |
| | 100.0% |

**Table 7.**
Confidence of respondents in their knowledge of the
opinions of publics on issues of concern to his or her
installation.
N = 84

How confident are you in your knowledge of the opinions
of publics affected by issues of concern to your
installation?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Never confident | 0% |
| Rarely confident | 2.4% |
| Sometimes confident | 14.3% |
| Confident | 53.6% |
| Very confident | 29.8% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 8.
Respondent's frequency of use of formal research
techniques to measure public opinion on topics of
concern to his or her installation.
N = 84

How often do you use a formal research technique (such
as a public opinion poll or other scientific measure)
to assess public opinion on a topic of concern to your
installation?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Never | 32.1% |
| Rarely | 44.0% |
| Sometimes | 20.2% |
| Often | 3.6% |
| Very often | 0% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 9.
Respondent's frequency of use of informal research
techniques to measure public opinion on topics of
concern to his or her installation.
N = 84

How often do you use an informal research technique
(such as contacts with opinion leaders or other
nonscientific measure) to assess public opinion on a
topic of concern to your installation?

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Never | 0% |
| Rarely | 1.2% |
| Sometimes | 17.9% |
| Often | 34.5% |
| Very often | 46.4% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 10.
Respondents' perception of commander's preferred role
for public affairs within their organization.
N = 84

As you see it, which of the following best describes
HOW YOUR COMMANDER VIEWS the overall role of public
affairs within your organization?

| Perceived preferred role | Percentage |
|---|---|
| To publicize the Air Force in any way possible. (Press Agentry role) | 6.0% |
| To disseminate information to the public as truthfully and accurately as possible. (Information Dissemination role) | 34.5% |
| To persuade the public to agree with the Air Force's point of view. (Two-way Asymmetric role) | 6.0% |
| To develop mutual understanding between Air Force management and the publics the Air Force affects.  (Two-way Symmetric role) | 53.6% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 11.
Respondent's preferred role for public affairs within
his/her organization.
N = 84

Which of the following best describes the overall role
you believe public affairs SHOULD HAVE in your
organization?

| Preferred role of public relations | Percentage |
|---|---|
| To publicize the Air Force in any way possible. (Press Agentry role) | 2.4% |
| To disseminate information to the public as truthfully and accurately as possible. (Information Dissemination role) | 29.8% |
| To persuade the public to agree with the Air Force's point of view. (Two-way Asymmetric role) | 6.0% |
| To develop mutual understanding between Air Force management and the publics the Air Force affects.   (Two-way Symmetric role) | 61.9% |
| | 100.0% |

PAOs indicated an even greater affinity for two-way symmetric models of public relations (see Table 11) than they perceived for their commanders. Well over half of the respondents, 62%, indicated that a two-way symmetric model of public relations was their goal for the organization, while 30% preferred the information dissemination role for their organization. Neither press agentry nor the two-way symmetric models were rated higher by PAOs as personal goals than they were as perceived commander's goals.

How well do PAOs feel they are meeting their goal of the ideal role for public relations? When asked to select the actual role public affairs was fulfilling in their organization, the two-way symmetric model again dominated (with 44%) but many respondents evidently returned to the information dissemination model (which increased to 41%) as the model best describing the actual role of public affairs within their organization (see Table 12). Evidently some PAOs sense their organizations fall somewhat short of their goal of mutual understanding with the public. The press agentry role (8%) and two-way asymmetric role (7%) each gained slightly when selected as actual roles for public affairs.

A measure of the congruency between the goals of the PAO for the role of public relations within the organization and his or her understanding of (perceived goal) their commander's preferred goal for public affairs within the organization was extrapolated from the data (see Table 13). Fully 65% of the respondents indicated perfect congruence between their goal for the purpose of public affairs and their perception of their commander's goal for the organization. Eight percent were one step from perfect congruency, 21% fell two steps away from their perception of their commander's view and only 5% were three steps removed.

Respondent's indicated a great deal of satisfaction with their current jobs (see Table 14). The majority of the respondents were either very satisfied (55%) or satisfied (33%) with their current position. Only 12% indicated that they were less than satisfied with their job in their current position.

## OPINION SEEKING

The majority of the respondents indicated that

Table 12.
Respondent's perception of the actual role fulfilled by
public affairs within his or her organization.
N = 84

Which of the following best describes the overall role
public affairs ACTUALLY FULFILLS in your organization?

| Role of public relations | Percentage |
|---|---|
| To publicize the Air Force in any way possible. (Press Agentry role) | 8.3% |
| To disseminate information to the public as truthfully and accurately as possible. (Information Dissemination role) | 40.5% |
| To persuade the public to agree with the Air Force's point of view. (Two-way Asymmetric role) | 7.1% |
| To develop mutual understanding between Air Force management and the publics the Air Force affects. (Two-way Symmetric role) | 44.0% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 13.
Congruency between respondent's perception of
commander's preferred role for public affairs and
respondent's own preferred role for public affairs
within the organization.*
N = 84

| Level of congruency | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Congruent | 65.5% |
| One level removed | 8.3% |
| Two levels removed | 21.4% |
| Three levels removed | 4.8% |
| | 100.0% |

*Congruency is a measure of the agreement between the
PAO's preferred role for public relations and his or
her perception of the commander's preferred role for
public relations. PAOs whose preferred role for public
relations was the same as their perception of their
commander's preferred role were said to be congruent;
those whose preferred role differed from their
perception of their commander's preferred role
were categorized by the number of models (Grunig's
models of public relations roles) by which they differ.

Table 14.
Respondent's rating of his or her current level of job
satisfaction.
N = 84

How satisfied are you with your job in your present
position?

| Response | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| Very dissatisfied | 0% |
| Dissatisfied | 8.3% |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 3.6% |
| Satisfied | 33.3% |
| Very satisfied | 54.8% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 15.
Respondents' frequency of informal contact with opinion leaders.
N = 84

To stay abreast of public opinion and attitudes about my installation I seek informal contact with opinion leaders...

| Frequency of contact | Percentage |
|---|---:|
| Never | 0% |
| Rarely | 1.2% |
| Sometimes | 10.7% |
| Often | 40.5% |
| Very often | 47.6% |
| | 100.0% |

they sought informal contact with opinion (or thought) leaders frequently in order to assess opinion and attitudes toward their installation (see Table 15). Most indicated that they sought informal contact very often (48%) or often (41%). Only 12% indicated they sought informal contact less frequently. PAOs reported less inclination to seek informal contact with the general public than with opinion leaders as a form of research (see Table 16). Fewer respondents indicated using this technique very often (23% for seeking informal contact with the public versus 48% seeking informal contact with opinion leaders). Forty-three percent indicated seeking informal contact with the public often, 25% said they sometimes did the same and roughly 10% said they rarely sought informal contact.

## ATTITUDES TOWARD RESEARCH EMPHASIS AND NEED

In an effort to measure the perceptions of PAOs toward the current emphasis on public opinion research within the public affairs career field each respondent was asked whether he or she believed more emphasis was needed on knowing public opinion (see Table 17).

Table 16.
Respondent's frequency of informal contact with the
public.
N = 84

To stay abreast of public opinion and attitudes about
my installation I seek informal contact with the
public...

| Frequency of contact | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Never | 0% |
| Rarely | 9.5% |
| Sometimes | 25.0% |
| Often | 42.9% |
| Very often | 22.6% |
| | 100.0% |

Twenty-one percent of the respondents stated that much
more emphasis was needed, 52% indicated that more
emphasis was needed and 26% felt that the current
emphasis placed on knowing public opinion was just
right. (In judging the response to this question one
should bear in mind the potential context effect of
asking this question within a survey on the topic of
public opinion research.) Additionally each respondent
was asked to predict the future trend of the importance
of knowing public opinion for the success of the public
affairs mission (see Table 18). The majority of
respondents (45%) indicated that knowing public opinion
would become much more important in the future, 38%
felt it would become more important, and 15% of the
respondents indicated that there would be no change
from the present level of importance. Although not
quantified for the study, a large number of respondents
indicated that the impact of budget cuts on the future
of the Air Force was the driving force behind the
growing importance of knowing public opinion and this
may have influenced attitudes toward the current
emphasis on this aspect of public relations within the
career field as well.

# DEFINING AND RESEARCHING PUBLICS

In the first of a series of questions designed to
determine the basis on which PAOs routinely
conceptualize the publics with whom they work, 55%
routinely used demographic characteristics as a basis
for defining publics, roughly 44% did not routinely use
demographic characteristics in defining publics (see
Table 19). Fifty-six percent of the respondents
routinely defined publics as groups of people in
conflict, competition or interaction with their
organization while 44% did not (see Table 20). But the
most common conceptual framework indicated by PAOs as
routinely used in defining publics was based on issue
awareness (see Table 21). Fully 82% of the respondents
indicated that they used awareness of issues as the
basis for defining publics. Eighteen percent indicated
that they do not define their public based on
individual cognitive relationships to issues.

The majority of the public affairs officers
surveyed indicated that they focus their research
efforts (either formally or informally) toward specific

groups when seeking measures of public opinions and attitudes (see Table 22). Fifty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they tailor their research efforts toward specific groups.

The majority of respondents did not agree that there was a tendency among PAOs to avoid "public relations" practices (e.g., persuasion) because of restrictions on public affairs activities (see Table 23). Seventy-four percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement and only 13% indicated that they perceived a tendency to avoid public relations activities among public affairs officers. Many indicated that they believed the Air Force was doing an outstanding job of "public relations" despite any barriers to research. An equally large number agreed that the Air Force does have a legitimate need to survey the public, either formally or informally, in order to accomplish its public affairs mission effectively (see Table 24). Some 85% of the respondents agreed with the statement that the Air Force has a right to measure the opinions of publics on issues that affect the Air Force, while only 5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

Table 17.
Respondent's perception of emphasis on knowing opinions
of publics.
N = 84

Would you say that the concern within Air Force public
affairs on knowing the opinion of external publics...

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Needs a lot less emphasis | 0% |
| Needs less emphasis | 0% |
| Is just right | 26.2% |
| Needs more emphasis | 52.4% |
| Needs a lot more emphasis | 21.4% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 18.
Respondent's perception of the future importance of
knowing public opinion within Air Force public affairs.
N = 84

Looking ahead would you say that the Air Force's need
to know the opinion of publics in the coming decade
will...

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Become much less important | 0% |
| Become less important | 1.2% |
| Remain the same | 15.5% |
| Become more important | 38.1% |
| Become much more important | 45.2% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 19.
Respondent's use of demographic characteristics as way
of defining publics.
N = 84

I usually define publics on the basis of demographic
characteristics.

| Response toward statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 2.4% |
| Disagree | 22.6% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 19.0% |
| Agree | 54.8% |
| Strongly agree | 1.2% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 20.
Respondent's tendency to define publics as groups of
people.
N = 84

I usually define publics as groups of people in
conflict, competition or interaction with my
organization.

| Response toward statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 1.2% |
| Disagree | 25.0% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 17.9% |
| Agree | 50.0% |
| Strongly agree | 6.0% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 21.
Respondent's tendency to define publics based on their
awareness of an issue.
N = 84

I usually define publics on the basis of their
relationship to a particular issue, such as whether
they are unaware of the issue but potentially affected,
aware of the issue, or both aware and active concerning
the issue.

| Response toward statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 0% |
| Disagree | 3.6% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 14.3% |
| Agree | 57.1% |
| Strongly agree | 25.0% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 22.
Respondent's tailoring of research toward specific
groups.
N = 84

I try to tailor my research effort to specific groups
rather than seeking the opinion of the general public.

| Response to statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 4.8% |
| Disagree | 33.3% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 4.8% |
| Agree | 52.4% |
| Strongly agree | 4.8% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 23.
Respondent's attitude toward hesitancy to conduct
public relations activities.
N = 84

Air Force public affairs people tend to overcompensate
for the restrictions on public affairs activities by
avoiding any practice that seems too much like "public
relations."

| Response to statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 11.9% |
| Disagree | 61.9% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 3.6% |
| Agree | 16.7% |
| Strongly Agree | 6.0% |
| | 100.0% |

Table 24.
Respondent's attitudes toward right to measure the
opinions of publics.
N = 84

Public affairs officers have a right to measure the
opinions of publics on issues that affect the Air
Force.

| Response toward statement | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Strongly disagree | 0% |
| Disagree | 4.8% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 10.7% |
| Agree | 51.2% |
| Strongly agree | 33.3% |
| | 100.0% |

# CHAPTER V

## RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES

Analysis of the data from the sample indicated that the vast majority of respondents saw knowing public opinion as very important to their job as chief or director of public affairs (86.9%). The remainder of the group saw it as either important (9.5%) or sometimes important (3.6%).

## IMPORTANCE OF PUBLICS' OPINIONS

In order to test my first hypothesis (the more important a PAO thinks knowing public opinion is, the more research he or she will conduct) it was necessary to combine the values of important and sometimes important in the importance of knowing public opinion variable. This resulted in 13.1% of the sample as rating the need to know public opinion as important. The respondent's report on the frequency of public opinion research conducted was a variable created by combining each individual's scores on two variables; their report on use of formal research and their report on use of informa' research. In this combined variable for the total level of research, 59.5% of respondents

fell into the part conducting less research and 40.5% were in the part conducting more research.

Chi-square analysis failed to produce statistically significant results between the amount of research being conducted by respondents who rated knowing public opinion as important and those who rated it as very important (see Table 25 below). This finding failed to support my hypothesis that a greater belief in the importance of knowing public opinion would correlate with a greater research effort. In this instance the lack of variability in the responses on the importance of knowing public opinion could be a factor affecting the power available to test the hypothesis.

The second hypothesis (the higher the respondent's level of education, the more important he or she will think it is to know public opinion) looked at the relationship between the variable on the importance of public opinion and the respondent's education level (see Table 26). In the education variable 41.7% of the respondents did not have a graduate degree while 58.3% had received a graduate degree. The importance of public opinion variable remained the same as in the

Table 25.
Respondent's attitude toward the importance of knowing
public opinion with respondent's use of public opinion
research.*
N = 84

| Amount of Research reported by PAO[1] | Importance of Knowing Public Opinion | |
|---|---|---|
| | Important | Very Important |
| Conducting less Research | 72.7% | 57.5% |
| Conducting more Research | 27.3% | 42.5% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 11 | N = 73 |

Chi-square = 0.53    Phi = 0.10

*One cell with expected frequency less than five.
[1]A combined variable of measures of frequency of formal
and informal research reported by the respondent on the
following scale:  5 = Very Often, 4 = Often, 3 =
Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never.  (59.5% of
respondents in first group, 40.5% in second).

previous test.

Chi-square analysis of the relationship between these two variables failed to support my hypothesis that a higher education level would correspond with a higher rating of the importance of knowing public opinion. Again, the lack of variability in the variable on the importance of knowing public opinion could be a factor affecting the ability to test this hypothesis.

## EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

In testing the third hypothesis (the higher the PAO's level of formal education, the more public opinion research he or she will conduct) the variable of education level between those respondents with bachelor's degrees or less education (17.9%), those with work toward a master's degree (23.8%) and those with master's degrees or work beyond a master's degree (58.3%) was used. The variable for the amount of public opinion research being conducted was on the same dichotomous variable used in testing the first hypothesis; respondents conducting less research and those conducting more research.

Chi-square analysis of these two variables again failed to support my hypothesis that more education will lead to more research (see Table 27). In fact, although statistical significance was not reached, the movement appeared to be in the opposite direction than was anticipated, i.e., those with more education reported conducting less public opinion research than those with less formal education. One possible explanation would be that those with more formal education conceptualize research differently -- more precisely -- than individuals with less formal education, and may be inclined to report less research than their counterparts. If true, a more precise measurement of the research variable would be necessary to preclude this bias.

## EDUCATION AND CONFIDENCE

The fourth hypothesis (the higher the PAO's level of formal education, the less confident he or she will be in their current knowledge of public opinion) sought to determine if more education would lead to less confidence in knowledge of public opinion (given the anticipated deficiency in formal research). In

Table 26.
Respondent's attitude toward importance of knowing
public opinion by respondent's level of education.*
N = 84

| Reported Importance of knowing Public Opinion[1] | Education Level | |
|---|---|---|
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| Important | 17.1% | 10.2% |
| Very Important | 82.9% | 89.8% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 35 | N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.54    Phi = 0.10

*One cell expected frequency less than five.
[1]Variable measured on following scale:  Very important,
important, sometimes important, rarely important, never
important.

Table 27.
Respondent's reported use of public opinion research by
level of education.
N = 84

| Amount of Research reported by PAO[1] | Education Level | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | B.A., B.S. or less | Work twd Master's | Graduate Degree |
| Conducting less Research | 33.3% | 60.0% | 67.3% |
| Conducting more Research | 66.7% | 40.0% | 32.7% |
| | 100.0% N = 15 | 100.0% N = 20 | 100.0% N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.06    Cramer's V = 0.25

[1]A combined variable of measures of frequency of formal
and informal research reported by the respondent on the
following scale:  5 = Very Often, 4 = Often, 3 =
Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never.  (59.5% of
respondents in first group, 40.5% in second).

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Table 28.
Respondent's confidence in his/her knowledge of public
opinion by respondent's level of education.
N = 84

| Reported Confidence in knowledge[1] | Education Level | |
|---|---|---|
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| Less than Confident | 8.6% | 22.4% |
| Confident | 57.1% | 51.0% |
| Very Confident | 34.3% | 26.5% |
| | 100.0% N = 35 | 100.0% N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.23    Cramer's V = 0.18

[1]Variable measured on following scale:  Very confident,
confident, sometimes confident, rarely confident, never
confident; Last three values combined as less than
confident.

testing this hypothesis the dichotomous variable of education (with or without graduate degree) was used with the variable of the respondent's reported confidence in his or her knowledge of public opinion. Although the lack of formal research in the field was substantiated, chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis. Although movement appeared to be in the anticipated direction (see Table 28), statistical significance was not reached.

To test the hypothesis that the less experience a PAO has in public affairs, the less he or she will support public opinion research as a legitimate function of public affairs (hypothesis 5) two variables were used (see Table 29). The independent variable was a dichotomous variable of experience level, with ten or fewer years as one value (52.6%) and 11 or more years (47.4%) as the second value. The dependent variable was a measure of the respondent's agreement with a statement about the legitimacy of public opinion measurement for Air Force public affairs. Chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis that PAOs with less experience would be less supportive of public opinion research.

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ROLE

In testing the hypothesis that education level would affect the type of public relations a PAO would conduct within his or her organization (hypothesis 6) two variables were used (see Table 30). Education level was used as a dichotomous variable (respondents with and without graduate degrees). The public relations role for the organization was also on a dichotomous variable taken from each respondent's selection of the current model of public relations they saw as their organization's current role. The press agentry and public information models were combined to form the one-way model (40.5% of the respondents) and the two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric values were combined to form the two-way model (59.5% of the respondents).

Chi-square analysis of the relationship between the two variables showed a statistically significant relationship between education level and the model of public relations employed. Public affairs officers who had obtained advanced degrees engaged in two-way models of public relations (either asymmetric or symmetric) more often than PAOs with less formal education.

Table 29.
Support for public opinion measurement by respondent's
level of experience.
N = 84

Statement:  Public affairs officers have a right to
measure the opinions of publics on issues that affect
the Air Force.

|  | Experience Level | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Agreement | Less | More |
| With Statement[1] | Experience | Experience |
| Do Not Agree | 13.3% | 17.9% |
| Agree | 55.6% | 46.2% |
| Strongly Agree | 31.1% | 35.9% |
|  | 100.0% | 100.0% |
|  | N = 45 | N = 39 |

Chi-square = 0.67    Cramer's V = 0.09

[1]Variable measured on the following scale:  Strongly
agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree,
strongly disagree.  Last three categories combined as
do not agree.

Table 30.
Reported actual role of public affairs within
respondent's organization by respondent's level of
formal education.
N = 84

| Reported Role of Public Affairs[1] | Education Level | |
|---|---|---|
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| One-way Model | 62.9% | 38.8% |
| Two-way Model | 37.1% | 61.2% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 35 | N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.05    Phi = 0.23

[1]Press agentry and information dissemination models =
one-way manner.  Two-way asymmetric and two-way
symmetric models = two-way manner.

Additionally, because the experience level of the PAOs could also be a strong influence (confounding variable) on the model of public relations used by PAOs I decided to run the analysis again while controlling for experience level. Using a dichotomous variable of experience level, with ten or fewer years as one control (52.6%) and 11 or more years as the second control, I ran the analysis again. The results (see Tables 31 and 32) were surprising. A strong influence from experience level was evident on the relationship as analysis of the relationship between education level and model of public relations conducted failed to reach significance for the less experienced group. The more experienced group, however, exhibited a strong relationship between education level and propensity to conduct public relations in a two-way manner.

As the literature indicates that two-way models of public relations coincide with greater levels of research than one-way models of public relations I hypothesized that respondents who reported operating within a two-way model of public relations would also report conducting more public opinion research (hypothesis 7). In testing the hypothesis I used the

Table 31.
Reported actual role of public affairs within
respondent's organization by respondent's level of
formal education (with control for experience).
N = 84

| Reported Role of Public Affairs[1] | Lower Experience[2] Education Level | |
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| --- | --- | --- |
| One-way Model | 59.1% | 52.2% |
| Two-way Model | 40.9% | 47.8% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 22 | N = 23 |

Chi-square = 0.86    Phi = 0.06

[1]Press agentry and information dissemination models =
one-way manner.  Two-way asymmetric and two-way
symmetric models = two-way manner.
[2]Respondents with one through 10 years experience in
Air Force public affairs (53.6% of respondents).

Table 32.
Reported actual role of public affairs within
respondent's organization by respondent's level of
formal education (with control for experience).
N = 84

| | Higher Experience[2] | |
| Reported Role | Education Level | |
| | Without | With |
| of Public Affairs[1] | Graduate Degree | Graduate Degree |
|---|---|---|
| One-way Model | 69.2% | 26.9% |
| Two-way Model | 30.8% | 73.1% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 13 | N = 26 |

Chi-square = 0.02    Phi = 0.40

[1]Press agentry and information dissemination models =
one-way manner.  Two-way asymmetric and two-way
symmetric models = two-way manner.
[2]Respondents with 11 through 27 years experience in Air
Force public affairs (46.4% of respondents).

Table 33.
Respondent's reported use of public opinion research by
reported actual role of public affairs in his/her
organization.
N = 84

| Amount of Research reported by PAO[1] | Role in Organization[2] | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | One-way Model | Two-way Model |
| Conducting less Research | 63.4% | 55.8% |
| Conducting more Research | 36.6% | 44.2% |
| | 100.0% N = 41 | 100.0% N = 43 |

Chi-square = 0.62    Phi = 0.07

[1]A combined variable of measures of frequency of formal
and informal research reported by the respondent on the
following scale:   5 = Very Often, 4 = Often, 3 =
Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never.   (59.5% of
respondents in first group, 40.5% in second).
[2]Press agentry and information dissemination models =
one-way manner.  Two-way asymmetric and two-way
symmetric models = two-way manner.

dichotomous variables of reported model of public relations and level of research previously introduced (see Table 33). Chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis that respondents using two-way models of public relations would conduct more public opinion research than respondents reporting operation in a one-way model of public relations.

My eighth hypothesis, that PAOs who conduct public relations in a two-way manner will seek more informal contact with the public than PAOs who conduct public relations in a one-way manner (see Table 34) used variables of models of public relations and the respondent's reported frequency of informal contact with the public. Chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis that operation within a two-way model of public relations would lead to seeking more informal contact with the general public as a means of researching public opinion.

## GOAL CONGRUENCY AND JOB SATISFACTION

In testing my hypothesis that PAOs whose preferred overall role of public relations differs from their perception of their commander's preferred overall

role for public relations would express less job
satisfaction, a measure of the congruency between the
PAO's preferred role and his or her perceived preferred
role for their commander was used (hypothesis 9). This
variable of congruency was then dichotomized between
those with complete congruency (65.5%) and those
without complete congruency (34.5%). This variable was
then used in chi-square analysis with the respondent's
reported level of job satisfaction (see Table 35).
Although a smaller percentage of respondents whose
goals and perceived commander's goals were congruent
were less than satisfied with their current job than
those whose goals and perceived goals were not
congruent, statistical significance was not reached.
Chi-square analysis failed to support my hypothesis
that those without congruency between their goals and
their perception of their commander's goals will
express less job satisfaction. One potential
confounding variable is the duration of the working
relationship between PAOs and their commanders. Both
PAOs and commanders are very mobile within the
organization and a non-congruent relationship may be of
insufficient duration to erode job satisfaction.
Accounting for the duration of the relationship may be

Table 34.
Respondent's seek informal contact with the public by
reported role of public affairs within his/her
organization.
N = 84

| Reported frequency of Informal contact with the Public | Role in Organization[1] | |
| | One-way Model | Two-way Model |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Sometimes | 29.3% | 39.5% |
| Often | 51.2% | 34.9% |
| Very Often | 19.5% | 25.6% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 41 | N = 43 |

Chi-square = 0.31    Cramer's V = 0.16

[1]Press agentry and information dissemination models =
one-way manner.  Two-way asymmetric and two-way
symmetric models = two-way manner.

Table 35.
Respondent's reported job satisfaction by congruency of
reported preferred role for public affairs within
organization with perceived commander's preferred
role.*
N = 84

| | Goal Congruency | |
|---|---|---|
| Reported Job Satisfaction[1] | Not Congruent | Congruent |
| Less than Satisfied | 20.7% | 7.3% |
| Satisfied | 24.1% | 38.2% |
| Very Satisfied | 55.2% | 54.5% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 29 | N = 55 |

Chi-square = 0.13    Cramer's V = 0.21

*One cell with expected frequency less than five.
[1]Variable measured on the following scale:  1 = Very
Dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 3 = Neither Satisfied
nor Dissatisfied, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied.
Values 1 through 3 recoded into Less than Satisfied.

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Table 36.
Respondent's reported use of public opinion research by
reported current work role.
N = 84

| Amount of Research reported by PAO[1] | Primary Work Role | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | More Technical | Mid-way Role | Mainly Managerial |
| Conducting less Research | 61.5% | 64.7% | 50.0% |
| Conducting more Research | 38.5% | 35.3% | 50.0% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 26 | N = 34 | N = 24 |

Chi-square = 0.51    Cramer's V = 0.12

[1]A combined variable of measures of frequency of formal
and informal research reported by the respondent on the
following scale:   5 = Very Often, 4 = Often, 3 =
Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never.   (59.5% of
respondents in first group, 40.5% in second).

the public relations function.  Perhaps the most
sophisticated (and arguably useful) conceptual
framework for defining publics for public relations
activities is by individual awareness of particular
issues.  In testing my hypothesis that the higher the
PAO's level of formal education the more he or she will
define publics based on their relationship to an issue
(hypothesis 11) two variables were used (see Table 37).
The independent variable is the dichotomous measure of
education level; those with graduate degrees and those
without.  The dependent variable is measure of the
respondent's agreement with a statement about the way
he or she defines publics.  Chi-square analysis of the
two variables failed to support my hypothesis that more
formal education would result in more defining of
publics based on their awareness of particular issues.

Another effective way to define publics is as
groups of people.  These groups can be in conflict,
interaction of competition with an organization.  While
perhaps somewhat less sophisticated than the previous
means of defining publics, defining publics as groups
remains useful for many public relations activities and
is more sophisticated and generally useful than the
last category, using demographics.  In testing my

hypothesis that the higher the PAO's level of formal education the mo-e he or she will define publics as groups of people (hypothesis 12) the variable of education level was again used. The dependent variable is measure of the respondent's agreement with a statement about the way he or she defines publics. Chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis that PAOs with more education would define publics as groups of people more often than PAOs with less education (Table 38).

In the third hypothesis concerning the definition of publics (hypothesis 13) I expected higher education to result in less frequent use of demographics as a means of defining publics. To test my hypothesis that the higher the PAO's level of formal education the less he or she would define publics on the basis of demographic characteristics, I again used the variable of education level with a dependent variable that was a measure of the respondent's agreement with a statement about how he or she defines publics (see Table 39). Again chi-square analysis of the variables failed to support my hypothesis that PAOs with more formal education would depend less on demographic characteristics in their definitions of publics.

In my final hypothesis I stated that the higher a PAO's level of formal education the more he or she would research specific publics rather than the general public (hypothesis 14). Again the dichotomous education variable was employed. The dependent variable is measure of the respondent's agreement with a statement about focusing research effort toward specific groups rather than the general public. Chi-square analysis of the variables (see Table 40) failed to support my hypothesis that PAOs with more education would tailor their research efforts more precisely than PAOs with less formal education.

Table 37.
Define publics based on relationship to issues by
respondent's education level.
N = 84

Statement: I usually define publics on the basis of
their relationship to a particular issue, such as
whether they are unaware of the issue but potentially
affected, aware of the issue, or both aware and active
concerning the issue.

| Agreement With Statement[1] | Education Level | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| Do Not Agree | 17.1% | 18.4% |
| Agree | 54.3% | 59.2% |
| Strongly Agree | 28.6% | 22.4% |
| | 100.0% N = 35 | 100.0% N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.87    Cramer's V = 0.05

[1]Variable measured on the following scale: Strongly
Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree,
Strongly Disagree. Last three categories combined as
Do Not Agree.

Table 38.
Define publics as groups of people in conflict,
competition or interaction with his/her organization by
respondent's education level.
N = 84

Statement:  I usually define publics as groups of
people in conflict, competition or interaction with my
organization.

| Agreement With Statement[1] | Education Level | |
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Do Not Agree | 40.0% | 46.9% |
| Agree | 60.0% | 53.1% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 35 | N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.68    Phi = 0.06

[1]Variable measured on the following scale:  Strongly
Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree,
Strongly Disagree.  Strongly agree and agree combined
into agree; last three categories combined as Do Not
Agree.

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Table 39.
Define publics based on demographic characteristics by
respondent's education level.
N = 84

Statement:  I usually define publics on the basis of
demographic characteristics.

| Agreement With Statement[1] | Education Level Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
|---|---|---|
| Do Not Agree | 45.7% | 42.9% |
| Agree | 54.3% | 57.1% |
| | 100.0% N = 35 | 100.0% N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.97   Phi = 0.02

[1]Variable measured on the following scale:  Strongly
Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree,
Strongly Disagree.  Strongly agree and agree combined
into Agree; last three categories combined as Do Not
Agree.

Table 40.
Focus research on specific groups by respondent's
education level.
N = 84

Statement:  I try to tailor my research efforts to
specific groups rather than seeking the opinion of the
general public.

| Agreement With Statement[1] | Education Level | |
| | Without Graduate Degree | With Graduate Degree |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Do Not Agree | 37.1% | 46.9% |
| Agree | 62.9% | 53.1% |
| | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | N = 35 | N = 49 |

Chi-square = 0.50    Phi = 0.09

[1]Variable measured on the following scale:  Strongly
Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree,
Strongly Disagree.  Strongly agree and agree combined
into Agree; last three categories combined as Do Not
Agree.

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

In examining the results of the survey we found
that Air Force public affairs officers who hold the
position of chief or director of public affairs offices
having host base responsibility at installations within
the continental United States are a well educated group
who, while conducting almost no formal research on the
opinions of publics, actively engage in informal means
to assess what publics think.  These same people also
prefer a two-way method of public relations as their
primary goal for their public relations activities.
Additionally, they perceive that their commanders also
prefer a two-way method of public relations and are
largely in agreement with them about the best approach
to public relations.

We also find that PAOs consider themselves to be
much more in a manager-practitioner role than in a
technician-practitioner role, tending to engage in
technical production only when necessitated by limited
staff or particular skill deficiencies.  Knowing the
opinions of publics is considered very important to
them and this attitude is reflected in the propensity
of PAOs to frequently conduct informal research

(primarily through contacts with opinion leaders and,
to a lesser extent, through contacts with the general
public). Formal methods of research remain problematic
for the PAO; formal bars, lengthy and demanding
approval procedures and budgetary constraints all
impede the PAO's ability to conduct formal research.

The study also shows that PAOs exhibit a great
deal of sophistication in defining publics. Most
reported that they primarily define publics according
to individual cognitive awareness of issues. They also
reported that they most often seek to research the
opinions of specific publics rather than seeking "mass
opinion" or "public opinion."

Although the data from this study supported only
one of the hypotheses put forth in the second chapter,
this could be due in part to the limited size of the
group. In particular, it was difficult to include
controls for other variables when testing relationships
because the expected frequencies would fall below the
limits necessary for dependable chi-square analysis.
Without the ability to control for possible confounding
variables it became impossible for the tests to isolate
small effects by the independent variables. Only in
the instance of the examination of the relationship

between education level and the preference between one-way or two-way models of public relations (where the hypothesis was that more research would correspond with two-way models of public relations) was it possible to run the tests again while controlling for the experience level of the respondent.  Then it was found that experience plays a significant role in the relationship between formal education and the preferred model of public relations.  However, attempts to exercise controls using other variables were untenable.

In retrospect, it would have been better to have concentrated on questions of attitudes and perceptions toward research rather than the actual use of research. This would have made it possible to extend the study to the entire population of public affairs officers through random sampling, thereby both increasing the sensitivity available in testing the relationships between variables and allowing controls for potential confounding variables to be used.

Another explanation for the lack of demonstrated relationships between variables concerns the limited variability within a number of the responses.  Because the group studied was, in essence, a self-selected group, their responses on several variables lacked the

variability needed for effective analysis. More precise measures of these variables (such as actual frequencies rather than the less precise terms of "often" or "very often") would help in discerning small differences between the members of the largely homogeneous group.

Additionally, it is possible that context effects may have affected some responses within the study. For example, the respondents' indication of the importance of knowing the opinions of publics may have been rated more highly because the question is contained in a survey on the topic of research. Also, it is possible that the desire to give a more "acceptable" answer may have inflated the estimates of the amount of informal research conducted. Because this question followed immediately one on the amount of formal research conducted (where most respondents gave a very low estimate) it is possible that the responses to the question "ballooned" to higher levels in an attempt to recover acceptability. In retrospect, it probably would have been desirable to reverse the sequence of these two questions within the survey to preclude the possibility of such a context effect.

While the respondents' perception that knowing
public opinion will become more important for public
affairs and the Air Force in the future is probably
directly linked to their knowledge of increasing budget
constraints and an anticipation of a period of change,
continued emphasis on formal education and follow-on
training in specific ways of obtaining accurate
assessments of the opinions of publics through informal
means would serve the Air Force well today and in the
days ahead.

This study may have shown more that the variables
which affect the use of research by civilian public
relations practitioners affect PAOs' attitudes toward
research rather than their actual use of research; the
strength of the barriers toward formal research faced
by PAOs appear to have effectively nullified the direct
affects of these factors. Perhaps more precise
measures specifically toward the use of informal
research could discern effects from these factors both
in the PAOs' use of informal research and in their
belief that informal research can effectively
supplement intuition.

In 1985 Hiebert and Devine conjectured that
insufficient training may have been a factor in the

failure of governmental public relations practitioners
to conduct research.  This study has shown, however,
that Air Force PAOs are an exceptionally well educated
group making the question of education seem an unlikely
candidate for the research shortfall.  Yet the nature
of the education afforded the Air Force PAO remains a
potential explanation for the limited use of research.
Advanced education in the humanities, social sciences
or other fields may give the PAO a general sense of the
value of research but more pragmatic approach to
learning public relations research techniques might
prove to be of greater value.  Thus it would be helpful
to examine the specific nature of the education
obtained by public affairs officers to discern its
affect on attitudes and use of research.  This
examination might naturally occur in three areas: the
initial training of PAOs; the types of formal education
they pursue; and finally, a look at the continuing
training provided by the Air Force.

In obtaining a more precise picture of the
educational background of the Air Force PAO it would be
necessary to assess the emphasis research is given in
the curriculum at the Department of Defense Public
Affairs Officer Basic Course at Fort Benjamin Harrison,

Indiana, (where PAOs receive their initial career field training) and also to determine whether practical techniques for informal research are taught in the course. Additionally, it would be beneficial to determine whether PAOs pursuing advanced degrees are doing so in public relations, or in fields directly related to public relations, and whether these degrees are equipping them with the knowledge, skills and desire to conduct informal research. And lastly, an assessment of the emphasis on research in continuing professional training of PAOs (such as public affairs conferences) would be an indication of the importance attached to the subject.

Even if we were to find that the current educational efforts have equipped PAOs with the knowledge necessary to conduct informal research on the opinions and attitudes of publics, the climate of support for research within the career field could still be a factor in its use. It is clear that the barriers to research "involving tradition and criticism and similar impediments are harder to grasp" (DeFend, 1988, p. 41) than those outlined in public law, yet some assessment of them could be obtained from the texts that govern the activities of the PAOs and set

the standards by which their performance is judged. An assessment of these standards could cast light on why PAOs perceive as important what they perceive to be important. Would we find these standards to be result oriented (creating a climate requiring a more interactive, two-way approach to public relations) or production oriented (creating a climate more attuned to a one-way, information dissemination approach to public relations)? These, and other indicators of the support for research within public affairs could prove to be of significant value in learning more about the causes of the gap between talking about research and actively engaging in it.

## SUMMARY

Statistical analysis lent support to the hypothesis that the higher a PAO's level of formal education, the more he or she would conduct public relations in a two-way manner. However, it was found that experience in the career field played a very strong role in the relationship between education and the public relations role used. PAOs with less experience in the career field showed little difference

in the use of one-way or two-way roles irrespective of
their education level.  Yet PAOs with greater
experience exhibited a strong difference in their
preference for one-way or two-way public relations
roles, preferences which corresponded with their level
of formal education in the direction predicted by the
hypothesis.  Neither experience nor education alone
accounted for the difference in preferred public
relations roles, but together high experience and
advanced education correlated with the reported use of
a two-way style of public relations.  Analysis of all
other variables failed to support my hypotheses with
statistical significance.

These survey results still may provide useful
information for practitioners and for public relations
researchers.  The results show that while the
impediments to research greatly affect the ways in
which PAOs conduct their jobs, they retain a positive
attitude toward research and put that attitude into
practice by shifting their efforts toward informal
means of research.  Also, given the positive
relationship between education and the type of public
relations employed by PAOs and the general acceptance
of two-way methods (especially the two-way symmetrical

model) of public relations, it seems that continued
support for education in research techniques for PAOs
can reap benefits for the service.  Yet some refinement
of existing programs might yield greater benefits.
Given the difficulty of conducting formal research as a
PAO, concentration on training in informal (yet not
haphazard) techniques for assessing the opinions of
publics could prove to be of greater benefit to the PAO
and the Air Force than study in formal techniques.

# APPENDIX A

USAF SCN 89-84

1. Considering your role in your current position, where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being a professional who handles the technical production of messages and public relations activities, and 10 being a professional and manager who facilitates communication and is involved in planning, policy and problem solving? Where would you fall on that scale.

```
Technical                         Facilitate
Production                        Communication
     1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
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2. How important would you say it is that, as the public affairs officer, you know the opinions of publics affected by issues of concern to your installation? Would you say that it is...

     5. Very important
     4. Important
     3. Sometimes important
     2. Rarely important
     1. Never important

3. How confident are you in your knowledge of the opinions of publics affected by issues of concern to your installation? Are you...

     5. Very confident
     4. Confident
     3. Sometimes confident
     2. Rarely confident
     1. Never confident

4. How often do you use a formal research technique (such as a public opinion poll or other scientific measure) to assess public opinion on a topic of concern to your installation?

     5. Very often
     4. Often
     3. Sometimes
     2. Rarely
     1. Never

5.  How often do you use an informal research technique
(such as contacts with opinion leaders or other
nonscientific measure) to assess public opinion on a
topic of concern to your installation?

>    5. Very often
>    4. Often
>    3. Sometimes
>    2. Rarely
>    1. Never

6.  What is your highest level of education?

>    1. Some college
>    2. Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent)
>    3. Some work toward Master's degree
>    4. Master's degree (M.A., M.S.)
>    5. Some work toward Doctorate degree
>    6. Doctorate degree (PhD, EdD)

7.  How many years of experience do you have in public
affairs?

>    _____ years. (Round to nearest yr)

8.  Individuals and organizations vary in how they
perceive the purpose of public relations.  As you see
it, which of the following best describes HOW YOUR
COMMANDER VIEWS the overall role of public affairs
within your organization?

>    1. To publicize the Air Force in any way possible.
>    2. To disseminate information to the public as
>       truthfully and accurately as possible.
>    3. To persuade the public to agree with the Air
>       Force's point of view.
>    4. To develop mutual understanding between Air
>       Force management and the publics the Air Force
>       affects.

9.  Which of the following best describes the overall role you believe public affairs SHOULD HAVE in your organization?

1. To publicize the Air Force in any way possible.
2. To disseminate information to the public as truthfully and accurately as possible.
3. To persuade the public to agree with the Air Force's point of view.
4. To develop mutual understanding between Air Force management and the publics the Air Force affects.

10.  Which of the following best describes the overall role public affairs ACTUALLY FULFILLS in your organization?

1. To publicize the Air Force in any way possible.
2. To disseminate information to the public as truthfully and accurately as possible.
3. To persuade the public to agree with the Air Force's point of view.
4. To develop mutual understanding between Air Force management and the publics the Air Force affects.

11.  To stay abreast of public opinion and attitudes about my installation I seek informal contact with opinion leaders...

5. Very often
4. Often
3. Sometimes
2. Rarely
1. Never

12.  To stay abreast of public opinion and attitudes about my installation or unit I seek informal contact with the public...

5. Very often
4. Often
3. Sometimes
2. Rarely
1. Never

13.  Would you say that the concern within Air Force public affairs on knowing the opinion of external publics...

     5.  Needs a lot more emphasis
     4.  Needs more emphasis
     3.  Is just right
     2.  Needs less emphasis.
     1.  Needs a lot less emphasis

14.  Looking ahead would you say that the Air Force's need to know the opinion of publics in the coming decade will...

     5.  Become much more important
     4.  Become more important
     3.  Remain the same
     2.  Become less important
     1.  Become much less important

15.  How satisfied are you with your job in your present position?

     5.  Very satisfied
     4.  Satisfied
     3.  Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
     2.  Dissatisfied
     1.  Very dissatisfied

---

For each of the following statements please tell me whether you strongly agree with the statement, agree with the statement, think the statement is neither true nor false, disagree with the statement, or if you strongly disagree with the statement.  The first statement...

---

16.  Public affairs officers have a right to measure the opinions of publics on issues that affect the Air Force.

        $SA_5$   $A_4$    $N_3$    $D_2$    $SD_1$

17.  I usually define publics on the basis of demographic characteristics.

        $SA_5$   $A_4$    $N_3$    $D_2$    $SD_1$

18.  I usually define publics on the basis of their relationship to a a particular issue, such as whether they are unaware of the issue but potentially affected, aware of the issue, or both aware and active concerning the issue.

$SA_5$  $A_4$  $N_3$  $D_2$  $SD_1$

19.  I usually define publics as groups of people in conflict, competition or interaction with my organization.

$SA_5$  $A_4$  $N_3$  $D_2$  $SD_1$

20.  Air Force public affairs people tend to overcompensate for the restrictions on public affairs activities by avoiding any practice that seems too much like "public relations."

$SA_5$  $A_4$  $N_3$  $D_2$  $SD_1$

21.  I try to tailor my research efforts to specific groups rather than seeking the opinion of the general public.

$SA_5$  $A_4$  $N_3$  $D_2$  $SD_1$

That concludes the survey.  Thank you.

22.   1.  Male   2.  Female

23.   1.  Military  2.  Government service

APPENDIX B

30 October 1989

«NAME»
«ADDRESS»
«BASE»

Dear «SALUTATION»,

No organization can take public opinion for granted. No one can assume that good performance or doing the right thing will bring understanding and support. Today, more than ever, a proactive approach to public affairs is recognized as essential to success. As a graduate student at the University of Texas, I am examining the practice of public opinion measurement -- a fundamental element of proactivity -- within the Air Force.   While many factors impede a PAO's ability to assess the opinions of publics, it is a practice that remains crucial for informed decision making.

I plan to call you in the coming days to ask a few questions about the role of public opinion measurement for you and your organization.  The survey (USAF SCN 89-84) takes only about 8 minutes to complete.  I know that your time is valuable and demands innumerable, yet your contribution is important, not only to me, but to a better understanding of current efforts toward proactivity.  As «CHIEF» of Public Affairs for «PLACE» you are part of a limited sample; your contribution will be of great help.

The individual survey results will remain confidential.  Your answers will be anonymous.  Also, if the time of my call is inconvenient I will gladly call again when it is more convenient for you.  I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,


BRIAN K. SATTLER, Captain, USAF
University of Texas at Austin

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## VITA

Brian Kent Sattler ████████████████████████████
████████████████ ██████████████████████████████
████████████████ After completing his work at
Fredericksburg High School, Fredericksburg, Texas, in
1980, he entered Southern Nazarene University in
Bethany, Oklahoma. He received a Bachelor of Arts
degree from Southern Nazarene University in May, 1984.
In May, 1985 he entered Officer Training School and was
commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States
Air Force on August 21, 1985. After serving as the
public affairs officer for Castle Air Force Base,
California, he entered The Graduate School of The
University of Texas at Austin in September, 1988.

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This thesis was typed by Brian K. Sattler.